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SUBJECT: SERBIA: UNHCR FINALIZES KOSOVO CONTINGENCY PLANNING WHILE
GOVERNMENT STILL HAS WORK TO DO

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) In the lead-up to Kosovo final status UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has finalized preparations on its contingency planning related to possible population displacements within and out of Kosovo. UNHCR assumes final status will involve a form of supervised independence for Kosovo, including a possible "secession attempt" by North Mitrovica. The Ministry for Kosovo and the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees admit that their preparations are still underway, while offering few concrete details of their planning and insisting that they expect minimal population flows from Kosovo into Serbia. End Summary.

KOSOVO FRONT AND CENTER AT UNHCR GENEVA HQ

2. (SBU) Kosovo is a key priority at UNHCR's headquarters in Geneva, UNHCR Deputy Director for Europe Udo Janz told refcoord on December 6, 2007. UNHCR was well aware of the possible scale and scope of potential population movements in and out of Kosovo in the run-up to the determination of final status, Janz said, adding that UNHCR would have the lead on humanitarian coordination in the region. "Every UN country team in the region recognizes this and will proceed accordingly," Janz said. UNHCR has organized a monthly Geneva-based inter-agency meeting, and created a pre-emergency task force on Kosovo. Effective January 2008, UNHCR will reinforce field operations in the region, to include the deployment of a public information officer to Pristina and two emergency staffers to Pristina and Belgrade. Janz assured refcoord that two humanitarian coordinators would be named in Serbia and Kosovo in the event of a serious crisis: UNHCR heads in Belgrade and Pristina would take up these roles.

UNHCR: PLANNING COMPLETED, PREPARATIONS IN PLACE

3. (SBU) According to the UNHCR contingency plan, which local staff have shared with refcoord, Kosovo final status will involve some form of supervised independence, possibly followed by a "secession attempt" by the Serb-dominated area of North Mitrovica. UNHCR's plan estimates that there could be 19,000 persons displaced from Kosovo to Serbia if transition is peaceful and a possible 72,000 people if the transition is accompanied by violence. According to the plan, in the event of a hard partition of North Mitrovica, UNHCR Belgrade will assume from UNHCR Pristina responsibility for North Mitrovica.

4. (SBU) In a December 7, 2007 meeting with key stakeholders and donors in Belgrade, local UNHCR representatives reported they planned to double stock of non-food items (NFIs) from 10,000 to 20,000 beneficiaries in Serbia. In the absence of the World Food Program (WFP) UNHCR will take the lead on food distribution. It has pre-positioned food stocks for 5,000 beneficiaries for 14 days,

distributed at the onset of any eventual emergency. Beyond this initial period, UNHCR will closely coordinate with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Serbian Red Cross, who have agreed to distribute food for the first three months. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) respectively will take the lead on health and nutrition.

15. (SBU) UNHCR is also prepared for potential unrest in Southern Serbia's Presevo, Bujanovac, and Medvedja municipalities, which have substantial ethnic Albanian populations, on the unlikely chance that they demand unification with Kosovo. According to UNHCR's contingency plan, such a demand could provoke suppression by Serbian security forces and a possible influx of persons into Kosovo. UNHCR's plan estimates that up to 20,000 ethnic Albanians could flee to Kosovo in the unlikely event of violence in South Serbia. The population on the move would mainly originate from areas closer to the boundary. Should there be no violence the population movement would be minor, up to 5,000 individuals, and possibly short term. UNHCR Representative in Serbia Lennart Kotsalainen and UNHCR Senior Program Officer Angelita Cecere told refcoord on several occasions in November and December 2007 that although this was an unlikely scenario, UNHCR added it to the plan as a precautionary measure.

FEW CONCRETE EXAMPLES OF GOS PLANNING, COORDINATION

16. (SBU) The Serbian government has shared little over the past several months with regard to its plans to deal with possible population movements from Kosovo into Serbia. As the prospect of an independent Kosovo becomes more likely, the Ministry for Kosovo and the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees have admitted to refcoord that preparations are underway, but they emphasize that they expect minimal population movements. The government has offered few concrete examples regarding its planning, and instead stressed that it will focus its efforts on encouraging Serbs to remain in Kosovo.

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17. (SBU) State Secretary for the Ministry for Kosovo Dusan Prorokovic told refcoord December 20, 2007 that the Ministry "has made preparations for the worst case scenario," including possible population movements on the same scale of March 2004, particularly through the Southern Serb municipalities of Bujanovac and Vranje. He added that the Ministry was coordinating its plans with the Serbian Commissioner for Refugees and other relevant government bodies. UNHCR Senior Protection Officer John Young told refcoord on December 26, 2007 that the Ministry planned to have four operational bases close to the Kosovo administrative border to keep fresh displaced individuals in Southern Serbia in an attempt to put political pressure on Kosovo authorities and the international community. According to Young, the Ministry, via its Coordination Center for Kosovo, intended to take charge of inter-ministerial coordination in the event of population movements.

18. (SBU) The Serbian Commissariat for Refugees, though technically responsible for accommodation and registration in the event of population movements, was less forthcoming than the Ministry for Kosovo on planning. Dragisa Dabetic told refcoord on December 27, 2007 that his only "action plan" was to continue to service the 17 collective centers which house 827 individuals in Kosovo, located mostly in Serb enclaves. When pressed, he said that in the event of a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by Kosovo, with no violence, he expected only a handful of individuals, if any at all, would cross the border, and they would be easy to assist. He claimed that if violence against minorities were to accompany a UDI, it would be because the international community "allowed this to happen." Though he tacitly admitted the Commissariat would assist individuals coming to Serbia from Kosovo, he added that "it is ironic the international community expects Serbia to clean up their mess." Dabetic provided no indication that he was in the loop on what the Ministry for Kosovo was planning.

COMMENT

¶9. (SBU) Post is confident in UNHCR's preparations and capacity at both the headquarters and local level to respond to any potential displaced persons from Kosovo to Serbia. We are encouraged that UNHCR has open lines of communication with the GOS. Post is concerned, however at the lack of GOS planning and its potential inability to respond in a coordinated, rapid manner in case of large movements of people across the border. As it has done in the past, the GOS most likely will muddle through in the event of a serious emergency, but it will likely be too little, too late. We are also troubled by the GOS's intention to restrict the movement of any new displaced persons to Southern Serbia, effectively limiting their freedom of movement. Post will continue to encourage and remind key ministries of their responsibilities to adequately and effectively provide for displaced persons. End Comment.

¶10. (U) This message has been cleared by USOP.

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